Endless prairies and ocean waves; long drives and highway expanse; dancing, smoke, sex, and physical desire – the core images of Jess Williamson’s new album *Time Ain’t Accidental* revel in the earthly and the carnal. After a protracted breakup with a romantic partner and longtime musical collaborator who left Williamson and their home in Los Angeles at the start of the pandemic, the album’s reckoning with loss, isolation, romance, and personal reclamation signals a tectonic shift for Williamson as a person and as an artist: from someone who once accommodated and made herself small to a woman emboldened by her power as an individual.

A daringly personal but inevitable evolution for the Texas-born, Los Angeles-based singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, *Time Ain’t Accidental* is evocative of iconic Western landscapes, tear-in-beer anthems, and a wholly modern take on country music that is completely her own. Above everything, sonically and thematically, this album is about Williamson’s voice, crystalline and acrobatic in its range, standing front and center. Think Linda Rondstadt turned minimalist, The Chicks gone indie or even Emmylou Harris’ work with Daniel Lanois. Ringing boldly and unobscured, it’s the sound of a woman running into her life and art head-on, unambiguously, and on her own terms for the first time.

Last year, Williamson and Katie Crutchfield of Waxahatchee released *I Walked With You A Ways* under the name *Plains*; a critically acclaimed recordfilled to the whiskey-barreled brim with feminine confidence, camaraderie,and straight-upcountry bangers and ballads. After past records *Cosmic Wink* (2018) and *Sorceress* (2020), both released on Mexican Summer, Williamson felt primed to shift in a new direction. Revisiting what she loved growing up, simplifying her process, and making music with a friend proved to be the best step forward for Williamson.

In early 2020, while getting used to the new estrangement and in quarantine with her thoughts, Williamson wrote and recorded the stripped-back standalone single “Pictures of Flowers” by herself at home. This experience became the foundation on which *Time Ain’t Accidental* was built. The song's lyrical themes were terrestrial and plain-spoken, with Williamson’s voice set against a drum machine and paired with textural guitar by her friend Meg Duffy (Hand Habits). Soon, Williamson realized that musically she was just as good—better, even—on her own. Tours with Weyes Blood, Kevin Morby and Hamilton Leithauser, and José González bolstered this newfound self-assurance, letting her voice ring out in rooms the size of which she hadn’t played before.

Amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic, Williamson began dating in Los Angeles and tracking demos centered on the realness of those experiences, filled with excitement, anxiety, and disappointment. The drum machine stuck around (this time in the form of an iPhone app), as did her determination to forge a new path as a truly solo singer and songwriter; as a woman finding the sound of herself without anyone else’s input. It was a lonely, but revelatory, period.

The core essence of that time is summed up in the opening line of “Hunter.” “I’ve been thrown to the wolves and they ate me raw,” Williamson sings, clear-eyed and with resolve, having come out the other side. Though tumultuous, the process of dating in LA revealed the album’s North Star, which anchors the song’s chorus and the album’s underlying sentiment more broadly: “I’m a hunter for the real thing.”

This theme comes up on the vivid torch song “Chasing Spirits,” when she sings, over whispers of steel guitar, that “the difference between us is when I sing it I really mean it.” The same energy resurfaces on “God in Everything”, with Williamson turning to the supernatural as a way of rising above the earthly realities of dating and rejection. “Being in lockdown alone, fresh out of a breakup, was a real hard time for me,” she remembers. “What I’m grateful for is having a period of stillness and desperation that forced me to turn inward and find comfort in a power greater than myself”.

In the album liner notes, Williamson too included a quote from Carl Jung that was sent to her by a close friend during this era of uncertainty and upheaval. It reads: “To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans, and intentions, and change the course of my life for better or worse.”

After many months spent alone and searching, Williamson finally found the realness she’d been longing for. First came the idea of Plains and the subsequent writing and recording sessions. Then, on one of her regular drives between her adopted home in southern California and her native Texas, Williamson found and rescued her dog, Nana, who had been abandoned and was running alongside a desert highway in New Mexico.

But all good things come in threes, and she soon found new love with an old acquaintance in Marfa, Texas, addressed straightforwardly in the title track “Time Ain’t Accidental.” “We fell for each other when I was out in West Texas visiting a friend, but then I left to go back to LA,” Williamson explains. “I wasn’t sure if or when we’d see each other again, but I felt so full of love and I hadn’t felt that way in a very long time. I wrote this song the day I got back home. It’s really the story of a day together—we flirted by a hotel pool bar and went on a drive, we had a sweet night—and then I had to go, neither of us really knowing what, if anything, would come next.”

Williamson brought the suite of demos and her newfound assurance to Brad Cook (who’d produced Plains) in Durham, North Carolina. The familiar setting fostered a safe environment for the deeply personal material, and Williamson unleashed her voice with total unselfconsciousness. They tracked her vocals in just a couple of takes for each song. “I kept thinking, ‘my voice feels different now – it’s been liberated,’” Williamson reflects. Cook encouraged Williamson to keep the iPhone app drum machine beats she’d programmed for some of the demos, then married it with banjos and steel guitars for an evident sense of old-meets-new.

Williamson now splits her time between Marfa, Texas and Los Angeles. *Time Ain’t Accidental,* with its synthesis of traditional country instrumentation with digital effects and modern sounds,unequivocally embodies the energy of the two very different places that she calls home. The album’s artwork, subtly menacing and neon in awareness and strength, displays, in Williamson’s words, “that supernatural forces are acting all around us, that we can trust that we will be in the right place at the right time.”

While *Time Ain’t Accidental* is remarkable for its bare confidence born of searching and longing for something real, Williamson also recognizes the mysterious whims of time that bricked her path (and she memorialized them on the title track). Ultimately, these unseen forces lured the singer back into her own. The timing was, indeed, no accident.